WHIRRAKEE

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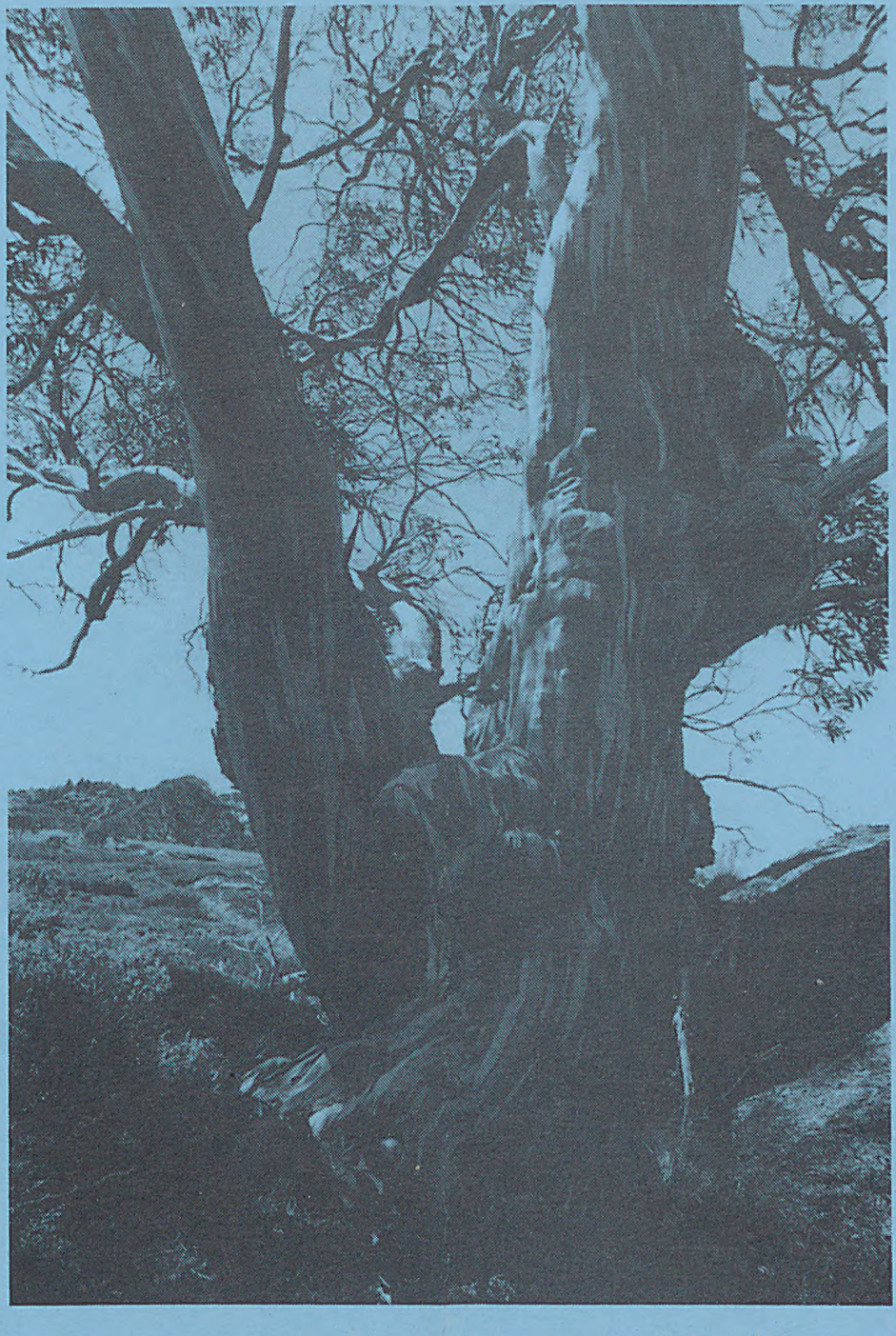

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.

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Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $25; Family $30; Concession: Single $20; Family $25. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $25.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Department of Food and Agriculture (formerly DARA) Meeting Room, Epsom. Meetings start at 7:30pm and conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month in members' homes. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearers listed above, together with the following members: J Cleary; W Demeo; R Orr; R Ruddick; M Stone; A Howe; P Howden.

Excursions The assembly point for excursions is outside the Ministry of Education complex in Havlin Street East, Bendigo, unless otherwise specified. Full-day excursions normally commence at 10am (usually on a Sunday); half-day excursions normally commence at 2pm and may be either on a Saturday or Sunday. Full-day or half-day excursions are usually held on the weekend following the General Meeting. Campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has 2 active sub-groups:

Bird Observers Group: meets on the first Friday of the month, at 7:30pm. The venue for meetings is the Department of Food and Agriculture (formerly DARA) Meeting Room, Epsom.

President: Mary Wilson
Secretary: Tom Burton

Mammal Survey Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 8pm in members' homes as announced in the monthly diary.

Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (39 5710)
Secretary: David McDonald,"Mulgara", Guys Hill Road, Strathfieldsaye (39 5756)
Equipment Officer: Ian Fenselau
Vice Chairman: John Guley

Front Cover: Alpine Snow Gum *Eucalyptus niphophila*
Photographer: Cynthia Watkins

The constant struggle for survival is epitomized by the contorted shape of this Snow Gum at Charlotte Pass in the Kosciusko National Park. These Gums extend up to about 1830m with a few scattered groups, on locally warmer sites extending beyond the general treeline.
This photo was taken during an excursion to the Park in January this year. A report by Bev Leeson can be found on page 10 in this issue.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 15, No.3, April 1994

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

CONTENT

Item	Contributor	Page
Bird Notes and Observations	Bird Observers Group	3
Bird of the Night Discussion:	Bill Flentje	
Swift Parrot		4
Little Friarbird		5
Bird Observers Group - Guest Speaker	Tom Burton	6
A Quail in a Blue Spruce - Bird Watching in the USA	Peter Allan	6
Grey-crowned Babblers in the Bendigo District	Chris Tzaros	8
Grey-crowned Babbler Sighting in Strathfieldsaye	Chris Tzaros	9
March Club Meeting	Sabine Wilkens	9
Mt Kosciusko Report (1)	Bev Leeson	10
From the Mailbag	Elaine Mathison	11
Cinnamon Bells, *Gastrodia sesamoides* in Bendigo	Sue Beattie	12
Tortoises Revisited		13

Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles.
Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.

Editor's note

I have learnt a lot about the environment in the last week or so. First, Anne Garrett in Queensland has confirmed that if orchardists want their paw-paws pollinated, they had better conserve rainforest, where the pollinators (hawk moths) live. Second, scientists at Kings Park, Perth, have shown that smoke rather than heat is what triggers germination in our fire-driven species. Third, a scientist in the USA claims that the disappearance of Californian toads is caused by destruction of eggs by excessive ultra-violet radiation associated with thinning of the ozone layer. Last, the decline of vultures in southern Africa is related to the decline of hyaenas (see the review of Trevor Pescott's talk to the Bird Observers). I put all of these in the context of the environmentalist cry 'We know enough - now it is time to act.' It may be time to act on our best information, but we certainly don't know enough. As well as environmental activists we need naturalists and ecologists who can improve the knowledge base that the activists use.

Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Back issues are available at a cost of 80 cents each. Complete sets are available at $ 8.00 for each volume. The above prices do not include postage.

Notes and Observations - March 4 Meeting

Author: Bird Observers Group

Highlights

Glossy Ibis (2) Tang Tang 23.2.94
Red-necked Stint (10) Tang Tang 23.2.94
Spotted Quail Thrush (1) One Tree Hill RP 16.7.93, 20.1.94
Swift Parrot (≈ 100) Mandurang Forest, Spring Gully 15.7.93
Grey-crowned Babbler (24) Summerfield Kamarooka, Whipstick, Jan. '94
Pied Butcherbird (2) Summerfield, Jan '94
Cockatiel (6) Summerfield, Jan '94
Bell Miner (2 or 3) Campaspe River, Redesdale North 13.2.94

Breeding

Yellow Robin (E) Longlea 2.10.93
Welcome Swallow (4E) Longlea 17.10.93
Grey Currawong (2Y) Longlea Oct. '93
Superb Fairy-wren (E) Longlea 22.10.93
Buff-rumped Thornbill (on nest) 24.10.93
Red Wattlebird (A+Y) Longlea 11.9.93
Black-winged Stilt (2A + 2Juv) Tang Tang 23.+27.2.94
Australasian Grebe (on nest) Longlea 4.3.94

Observations

White-backed Swallow (2) Emu Creek, Strathfieldsaye 22.8.93
New Holland Honeyeater (1) Strathfieldsaye 23.8.93
Buff-banded Rail (1) Emu Creek, Strathfieldsaye 18.9.93
Peregrine Falcon (1) Emu Creek, Strathfieldsaye 20.9.93
Wedge-tailed Eagle (2, dark) Junortoun 28.2.-3.3.94
Yellow-faced Honeyeater (1) Millwood Dam, Kamarooka SP 5.2.94
White-throated Needletail (6) Millwood Dam 5.2.94
White-throated Needletail (8) Junortoun 21.-27.2.94
Rufous Night-heron (1A) Millwood Dam 5.2.94
Rufous Night-heron (1Juv) Kamarooka SP 6.2.94
Rufous Night-heron (1Juv) Campaspe River, Redesdale North 13.2.94
Black-eared Cuckoo (1) Eppalock Forest 17.2.94
Spotted Nightjar (1) Kamarooka SP early Feb. '94
Crimson Rosella (1) Bendigo (Central) 18.11.93
Tawny Frogmouth (1) White Hills 4.3.94
Horsefield Bronze-cuckoo (1) Wellsford Forest 4.3.94
Grey-crowned Babbler (1) Strathfieldsaye 19.2.94
Common Myna (1) Loddon Valley Highway, Myers Flat 10.12.93
Grey Currawong (1) White Hills 15.10.93
Barn Owl (1) Epsom 15.9.93
Golden Whistler (1) Banded: Big Hill 12.4.93
Found: 12km north of Inglewood 4.6.93
Brown Falcon (12+) Lake Eppalock 12.2.94
Jacky Winter (2) Longlea 17.2.94
White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike (1) Longlea 17.2.94
Spotted Harrier (1) Axe Creek 17.2.94

Lists

Longlea (11 lists) 16.3.93-14.1.94, 17.2.94
Golden Square Jan.-Feb. '94
Redesdale North 13.2.94
Wellsford Forest 17.2.94, 4.3.94
Millwood Dam 24.11.93
Bendigo Sewerage Farm 24.11.93
Eppalock Forest 17.2.94

Notes

The water level in the Tang Tang swamp is at last going down. This has produced a change in the bird life from last year when it was full, and full of breeding spoonbills, ibis and cormorants. Now mudflats are exposed, giving waders a chance.

When Alf Howe visited Tang Tang on 23.2.94 to do a pre-Duck Season bird count, he found at least 500 Grey Teal at 8:45am (daylight saving time). By 9:30am, most had left, with only 200 present. A flock of 50 Black Ducks left the swamp about 9:15 and 40 Maned Duck flew off about 9:00am. 160 Straw-necked Ibis were still roosting at 8:45 and dispersed at about 10:15. It appears, according to Alf, that with the swamp so low, most of the ducks shelter on the swamp for the night and leave fairly early in the morning.

There are many big European Carp dead and floating in the shallow water. Where the creek leaves the main swamp to the north, the River Red Gums have fresh tips.

Golden Whistlers are known to be at least partially nomadic. An immature bird banded in the Chateau Leamon vineyard reached the Inglewood area, a distance of 48km. It was found dead 53 days after banding. This seems to have been a movement of a young bird away from its birthplace.

We do not usually see such large aggregations of Swift Parrots as the ≈100 found in the Mandurang Forest. The number of these beautiful migrants that come to our district from Tasmania varies widely from year to year.

Bell Miners were rarely found here before the last few years. Though they are splendid birds, it would be a pity if they were to become established here, as, like Noisy Miners (splendid birds also, in their way), they are aggressive towards other honeyeaters and displace them from the areas occupied by their colonies. Moreover there is strong evidence that lerp insects thrive in Bell Miner areas, though how the relationship works is far from clear.

Bendigo Bird Group - Bird of the Night Discussion (1)
Author: Bill Flentje

Subject: Swift Parrot *Lathamus discolor*

Calls: Consist of musical chattering calls, and a rapid call on the same tone used in flight and when agitated.

Appearance: Length 23 to 25cm in length, slightly larger than a Musk Lorikeet and smaller than a Rainbow Lorikeet. Male and female are similar in appearance. The main plumage is bright green in colour with red on the forehead, throat, shoulder and front part of the underwing, and reddish-brown tail. The crown and face are light blue. Outer tail feathers are dark blue.

Food: They generally feed in eucalypts among the foliage and blossoms to obtain lerps, insects, seeds and nectar. They have also been known to feed on garden fruit and berries.

Habitat: They breed in Tasmania and after breeding they usually flock to mainland Victoria, N.S.W. and South Australia and follow the flowering of eucalypts. They can often be seen in Bendigo forests between March and September in local areas where concentrations of flowering eucalypts are occurring.

Breeding: The birds breed in Tasmania and nearby Bass Strait islands. The nest is decayed wood material in a tree hollow, usually of a eucalypt, and from 6 to 20m above ground. 3 to 5 rounded white eggs are laid, and are incubated by the female for about 20 days, and the babies fledge about 7 weeks later.

General: As the name indicates, their flight is very swift, sometimes direct, sometimes with abrupt change of direction. They are sometimes found feeding in company with Lorikeets, and like Lorikeets may be seen clinging upside down to reach food. Also they are noisy birds while feeding, continually calling and occasionally screeching as one flies from one tree to another. Several pairs of birds may nest in the vicinity of one another if suitable hollows exist. They sometimes come to the ground to drink water.

Bendigo Bird Group - Bird of the Night Discussion (2)
Author: Bill Flentje

Subject: Little Friarbird *Philemon citreogularis*

Calls: Has several and varied calls, some fluid and musical others tending to harsh.

Appearance: Medium-sized 25 to 29cm long, the male being larger than the female. The plumage is generally greyish-brown above, greyish-white underneath. The bill is black, and naked blue skin is prominent under the eye. Distinct from other Friarbirds is the absence of any knob on the upper mandible of the bill.

Food: consists of nectar, fruits, seeds and insects.

Habitat: Shows a preference for waterways, rivers and streams, surroundings of swamps and lakes, but in Central Victoria is sometimes found in eucalypt forests where profuse flowering is occurring.

Breeding: Nesting may occur between August and March. The nest is usually built in pendulous foliage from about 2 to 10m above ground level, sometimes above water. The nest may be of strips of bark, grasses and rootlets bound into a cup-shape with cobwebs and spider cocoons, and lined with finer material. From 2 to 4 eggs are laid, which are pale pink with scattered reddish-brown or greyish lines, spots and blotches. Incubation and fledgling periods are not recorded.

General: They are known to drink water regularly at least in warm and hot weather and may aggressively defend their watering place. They often feed in mixed flocks where blossoms are abundant, but where individual trees are in blossom, they may defend their food territory. In the Bendigo district, they are nomadic and follow areas of heavy blossoming of eucalypts or disappear northwards to find more suitable habitat.

Bird Observers Group, March Meeting - Guest Speaker: Trevor Pescott
Author: Tom Burton

Trevor Pescott, who is well known as an author of books and a naturalist's column in the Geelong Advertiser, spoke to us about the dwarf emus of King and Kangaroo Islands, and showed us slides of birds and birding in the northern islands of Britain and in southern Africa. The island emus were significantly smaller than the mainlanders, and the Kangaroo Island emus were clearly larger than the King Island birds. Both species were wiped out by activities of Europeans in the early years of last century. The only good specimens remaining were collected in 1803 by the French scientists Baudin and Peron on the 'Geographique'. These took several live emus on board, but only two, one of each species, survived the journey; both birds died in 1822. the specimens are preserved either as mounted skins or articulated skeletons in the Paris, Florence and Geneva Museums. Trevor, with the cooperation of excellent curators, was able to take photographs of all the extant emus, and we were all fascinated by these photos. The King Island bird looked like a dark brown mini-cassowary, the Kangaroo Island bird more like a small copy of the mainland emu.
The travel slides were excellent - the Puffins were lovely, and the African birds exotic. I was particularly taken by the Secretary Bird and the other birds of prey. The vultures were impressive also. These birds had gone into decline for want of crushed bone in their diets: they need the calcium to make egg shells, but with fewer hyaenas crushing bones, there was less calcium available. As a result, park rangers have had to employ a machine called, in the typically direct South African idiom, a 'donkey-crusher'. How it works was not explained, but its function was clear enough. Vulture populations have picked up since the introduction of the donkey-crusher. The other highlights for me were the flamingoes and the foggy Namibian coast, where many animals and plants are adapted to take water from the air rather than the soil.
In all it was a very interesting talk, which deserved the very good audience it received and more.

A Quail in a Blue Spruce - Bird Watching in the West (U.S.A.)
Author: Peter Allan

Having a son living in San Francisco directly opposite one of the world's great city parks can be a very useful thing, especially if he too is an ornithologist. In our four months stay in mainly West Coast U.S.A., the Golden Gate Park provided me with some thirty new species, and helped in confirmation of several others. Such is the miracle of International Date Lines that we took our first walk in the Park about 4.30pm, Monday October 25th, having left Tullamarine at 11.00am the same day, and saw our first bird at 4.33pm. Said Charles "there is a Hummingbird nearby" and there, suspended on blurred wings with that peculiar perpendicular body position was an Anna's Hummingbird, advancing to dip into a tubular flower, reversing wings to back out and manoeuvring like a toy helicopter. We saw several of these little 100mm sprites in dull red green and pale grey in the Park and also in San Diego Zoo, where one was building a nest on a thin twig in a walk-through aviary. The nest made from cotton from a boll, was not much bigger than a large fluffy golf ball. As Annas were inside and outside the aviary my nest builder may have been a freeloader, not an inmate.

Back to the quail. A loud thump and a cackle from a tall Blue Spruce attracted my attention and glasses from busy nut-gathering squirrels to a dumpy, distinctive bird with a nodding plume. "That's a quail in the tree", I said. "They do that" said No 1 Son. American Quails come Texas size, being about a third larger than our Stubble Quail generally. Several species have thin plumes curling over their eyes which I would have thought distracting to the bird's overhead vision. Ours was a California Quail appropriately enough, a species common in the Park, toddling along in quite large groups, including small young.
The area opposite Charles' flat was the Arboretum containing large Australian and New Zealand sections. Here and elsewhere in "civilized" California the country looked familiar with many large eucalypts, acacias and other Down Under plants, but the big difference in bird life became more

and more obvious, a view confirmed by regularly reading of our "Field Guide to the Birds of North America", a well illustrated book from the National Geographic Society.
"Out" were honeyeaters, parrots and blossom- and nectar feeders generally, the more dominant species of Australia. "In" were seed and nut eating species, including some thirty Sparrow species, various Woodpeckers and Sapsuckers. This meant different colour patterns, green being less popular, possibly due to the amount of foliage turning red and yellow and disappearing in winter. Brown, grey and yellow red are common and lovely soft blue and purple greys, not the bright iridescent blues of fairy-wrens and parrots.
People sometimes compare the USA to Australia on a size basis, but in comparing flora and fauna one must remember that North America is one vast land mass from the vast wilderness of Canada with their short brilliant summers and freezing winters to the deserts and jungles of Mexico. Many species have specific migratory long distance movements in large flocks. Being there in late Autumn we saw some of these, particularly water birds and missed some species altogether, e.g. we saw not one of the twelve species or so of swallows, martins and swifts.
Perhaps one of the features I noticed most was also the difference in altitude with mountains twice the size of ours. In particular while the vast deserts and "Bad Lands" had a similar appearance at times to parts of our Inland, the altitude was often 5000 to 10000 feet, often snow-covered in winter and bisected by impressive rivers like the Colorado, Rio Grande and those running east to the vast Mississippi Basin.
Apart from Golden Gate Park some of our best birding was done against a magnificent backdrop of the Grand Canyon, Arizona, where, enjoying beautiful weather, we spent over two days, an experience all tourists should aspire to. The most memorable sight was a party of Whistler-sized Western Bluebirds, the males deep purple-blue with chestnut breast and flanks, perching on small green junipers against the blue haze tinted multi-cliffs and turrets, the strata in rainbow cake layers from the creamy white limestone rim down through the red, yellow and pale sandstones falling a mile below to the dark brown and green metamorphic rocks of the Colorado River bed.
In the Canyon the Common Ravens sometimes indulged in remarkable flights floating out over the rim, to fold wings and plunge like a falcon in winding spirals 500 to 1000 feet, at times upside down, then to pull up and flap around with a satisfied "Orrr" to land down below or ride an updraught back to the rim. These are BIG corvids, at over 600mm up to a tenth bigger than our largest Raven. They strut around the picnic areas, threatening tourists for food or belting hell out of pinecones to get the seed.
Other favourits were the attractive Sittella-like Nuthatches, both the cute little Pigmy species and the more solid White-breasted, which together with the Mountain Chickadees explored the stunted pines along the walking tracks or fed around the rubbish bins at the rear of the cafeteria, allowing excellent close-up views. Other interesting species seen in Arizona were the plumed Gambel's Quail, the bold attractive blue, crested Steller's Jay, the black, red and white coloured Rufous-sided Towhee, and, *en route* to the Painted Desert the Grackle, one of several species whose names correspond with our 'Drongos' and 'Galahs'. Grackles are part of a mixed group of species including the various Blackbirds, Orioles and Cowbirds.
At Holbrook we met the Great-tailed Grackle, looking rather like a bad drawing of a crow, or a Blackbird with Chough ancestry. Adult males are iridescent black with a purple sheen and a great flopping tail, while the females, 80mm shorter and brown and buff with refined tails, look like a different species. This flock inhabited a used machinery yard, adjourning to the next door eatery or the motel over the road for scavenged lunches, but proving surprisingly wary when I tried to photograph them.
Near Los Angelos we met old friends, the Spotted Turtledove and flocks of Starlings and also Mr Disney's usual Ducks, Dogs, Rodents etc. However in the evening hundreds of real life flocking American Crows added to the entertainment. Descending on Disneyland they perched in the peculiarly trimmed trees above the crowds, cawing away and popping down to assist in the cleaning up. More fun was the non-operating White Matterhorn Mountain where water still poured from a high portal. Here some adventurous crows were drinking and bathing, toddling into the short stream before it plunged over the ledge, for a short swim, only to be carried out into space and having to reactivate soggy wings and blunder back to the nearest perch, rather like Wiley Coyote running in air above a collapsed cliff. (No, I regret we did not see a Roadrunner).

More of our travels to come including how to tell thirty sparrows apart.

Grey-crowned Babblers in the Bendigo District

Author: Chris Tzaros

The Grey-crowned Babbler is a listed species under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988. It is threatened and declining in Victoria and the Bendigo district is no exception.

There are approximately 15 known colonies of Grey-crowned Babblers in the district at present. Signs of past habitation can still be seen as their bulky domed stick nests remain in eucalypt saplings or the outer foliage of mature eucalypts, typically in Grey Box *Eucalyptus microcarpa.* The Grey-crowned Babbler depends on open Grey Box or Yellow Gum *E. leucoxylon* woodland, usually with large remnant trees and an open understorey with some native grass and eucalypt regeneration. Such remnant trees are scarce in the district due to past mining and forest clearing practices, but some still occur along roadsides, on road reserves or on privately owned land, particularly to the north of Bendigo. Here the babblers forage on the trunks and branches, or on the ground amongst the litter layer. Of the approximately 15 known colonies of Grey-crowned Babblers in the district, the majority occur on privately owned property.

Some colonies in the district share their environment with human presence (i.e. boating clubs, school camps, caravan parks around the shores of Lake Eppalock). This human presence may well assist in discouraging predatory birds (e.g. Grey Currawongs and Brown Goshawks) away from habitats containing babblers. Birds of prey are discouraged further by the fact that the sedimentary soils where suitable babbler habitat exist do not provide for the establishment of high rabbit numbers. Grey-crowned Babblers are not known to occur, in this district, on granitic soils where high rabbit numbers are an annual occurrence (J. Robinson pers. comm.).

Moreover, at all known Grey-crowned Babbler colonies in the Bendigo district, Noisy Miners occur in the same habitat. The Blue-faced Honeyeater or Grey Butcherbird are also usually found with the babblers. It has been noticed that when predators are in the vicinity of a babbler colony, the babblers shelter and remain silent, and they probably gain protection from these three defensive species, particularly the Noisy Miner. However, although Noisy Miners may assist in protecting the Grey-crowned Babbler, they also harass them, sometimes quite severely, forcing birds to the ground. I have noticed that larger babbler colonies are harassed less by Noisy Miners than smaller colonies.

In January 1994, the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers (ATCV) in association with CNR conducted a survey on the Grey-crowned Babbler near the Whipstick and Kamarooka State Parks to the north of Bendigo. One colony of two birds was known before the survey began but as a result of the survey, three further colonies of four, eight and ten birds were located. Of the total four colonies, two are situated on privately owned land, one is within the boundaries of the Whipstick State Park and one colony uses both private and road reserve land. The colony of two birds, which formerly consisted of six to eight birds eighteen months ago is also within a gravel quarry site, but fortunately due to prompt action on behalf of CNR, gravel extraction has now ceased until further notice. There are potential problems with domestic cats and foxes at another colony site, which contains ten birds and is the largest known colony in the district.

Because a significant portion of the Grey-crowned Babbler population in the Bendigo district occurs on privately owned property, land owners play an important role in protecting habitat, and thus contributing to the continued survival of the Grey-crowned Babbler.

We would greatly appreciate knowing of any other colonies of Grey-crowned Babblers in the Bendigo district. Please contact the author on (054) 395544 or Peter Morison (Land for Wildlife Extension Officer, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources) on (054) 446666.

Thanks to John Burtonclay, John Robinson, Rob Price and Peter Morison for comments on this article.

Grey-crowned Babbler Sighting in Strathfieldsaye

Author: Chris Tzaros

Over the past six weeks, I have been attempting to locate colonies of Grey-crowned Babblers around the district, particularly near the Whipstick and Kamarooka State Parks, and I have yet to search areas to the east, west and south of Bendigo.

A most unusual event occurred on the morning of 19 February 1994: a Grey-crowned Babbler appeared in my garden at Guys Hill Road, Strathfieldsaye. Initially, I heard the unmistakable cackling call and there, in a *Pinus radiata*, perched a single Grey-crowned Babbler. I barely observed the bird before it took flight in a westerly direction, and, despite my playing of a tape recording of their call, the bird was not relocated.

Apparently, Grey-crowned Babblers have been known to disperse from colonies and explore new areas to establish a new colony. John Burtonclay (pers. comm.) reported observing a single Grey-crowned Babbler several years ago in James Cook drive, Mandurang.

If any other similar observations are made, I would be interested to hear of them.

March Club Meeting, Guest Speaker: Malcolm MacFarlane

Author: Sabine Wilkens

The Leadbetter's Possum, a beautiful, insectivorous, nocturnal, arboreal, sugar glider-sized endangered marsupial, one of Victoria's faunal emblems, was the subject of Malcolm's talk. This animal was once thought extinct and since its rediscovery in 1961 enjoys a high political and emotional status. This is not only lucky for this animal as a large knowledge base for it has accumulated, but other animals will doubtlessly also benefit from the implementation of this knowledge for the conservation and management of the possum.

Leadbetter's Possum requires two important habitat components: the availability of hollows for nest sites and a vegetation structure more typical of young regrowth forest for moving around in and for food (e.g. wattle exudate). Thus old and young trees are needed at the same time, a combination not often found in managed forests.

In 1939 very intense wildfires swept the Central Highlands of Victoria and burnt 75% of the montaine forests. These recovering forests still constitute an excellent habitat for the possum, however, over the next 50 years many of the 'stags' that, at present, provide nesting hollows will fall. This might result in a severe shortage of such sites, as the replacing trees might take 200 years to develop suitable hollows.

Malcolm explained that the strategies implemented to manage the animal consist of two phases: the protection of existing habitat and the active development of future habitat. A survey to assess the present habitat in the Central Highlands was commissioned, part of which was based on the counting of every single habitat tree from aerial photos! As a result, certain areas were excluded from timber harvesting.

We also heard some very interesting news about a possible extension of habitat for the possum beyond the hollow tree. Some animals were observed actually sheltering at the base of Snow Gums.

This opened up the question of 'how important are the hollows really' . At the moment this cannot be answered any differently from a few years ago when hollows were considerd absolutely essential but it goes to show that any mangement strategy must be 'adaptive' to be able to accommodate new knowledge such as this in the future.

The slides accompanying the talk were interesting, especially those of nest boxes constructed from old wooden water pipes. These apparently make exellent survey tools as the animals adopt them readily and can thus be readily confirmed to be present in a particular area.

Elaine Mathison thanked the speaker for providing sooo much information. There certainly was, and I probably only got about one-tenth down on paper. This fact should encourage members to attend these meetings so they may not miss out on the remaining nine-tenth.

Kosciusko - January 8 - 22 1994
Author: Bev Leeson

What a way to start a new year! - pristine mountain air; mostly mild, clear days, with the occasional mist for excellent photographs; a superbly appointed lodge; two excellent organisers and lots of friendly holidayers.

On our arrival at Kahane Lodge on Saturday January 8 we were greeted by Cynthia and Rob Watkins, who'd made this all possible. The weather was a timely reminder to all that one needs to be prepared for all weather when visiting the high country. I'd driven along the Alpine Way from Corryong (behind a horse float!) through hail storms. Upon reaching Perisher Valley and the Lodge, I found sleet, snow and a very cold wind. The following day was cold and windy but after that the weather was perfect for our pursuits.

Fine, clear days found people walking to the summit of Kosciusko via the Summit Road, the Lakes walk or coming up from Thredbo on the ski-tow. Imagine our delight in finding a harpist on the top. She'd carried her harp up in a back pack and it sounded absolutely beautiful in the cool, clean air. Rob Watkins did wonder, momentarily, if he'd stumbled into heaven!! Other activities included photographing wild flowers on Mt Stilwell, investigating Rainbow Lake, walking the tracks at Sawpit Creek, discovering the beauty of Porcupine Rocks, riding the tube to Blue Cow or driving to the Guthega Dam and Island bend where an Elbow Orchid had been noted.

Although we were a little early for a really good display of flowers, we nevertheless saw many species begging to be admired and/or photographed. The following list is not complete but will give some idea of those flowering:-

Ranunculus gunnianus
Craspedia sp. (Billy Buttons)
Richea continentis (Candle Heath)
Bentachondra panula (Carpet Heath)
Aciphylla glacialis (Mountain Celery)
Celemisa longifolia (Silver Snow Daisy)
Pimelea alpina (Alpine Rice Flower)
Euphrasia collina
Gastrodia sesamoides (Cinnamon Bells)
Pterostylis furcata (Sickle Greenhood)
Prasophyllum suttonii (Mauve Leek Orchid)
Prasophyllum alpinum (Alpine Leek Orchid)
Thelymitra ixioides (Dotted Sun Orchid)

Each evening we were transported to other beautiful parts of our own country or to countries overseas via slide or print.

We attended a Hindu wedding in a remote Himalayan state of India; visited Israel and the holy land; ventured into outback Australia and the Centre; experienced winter near Myrtleford, Victoria; travelled by boat in Malaysia; listened to and looked at beautiful birds photographed by Rob, Cynthia, Bill Flentje and Dr Ray Channells and wife Norma who came especially for the occasion from Yeppoon in Queensland; studied the geology and history of beautiful Fraser Island; climbed thousands of steps in China; explored a mining area in the Pilbara; whirled through National Parks in Canada and the USA; and reminisced about previous mountain top holidays in Victoria and NSW.

Reptiles, mammals and birds too were noted. Perhaps most notable being the Gang Gang Cockatoos and the nesting Flame Robins.

In addition to slides in the evenings we were entertained by a pianist, ballet dancer (and her baby sister), a chamber group, a guitarist and members who played button accordion, mouth organ and treble recorder. Recitations of Australian poetry rendered by Nancy Stone were greatly appreciated and reminded us or our rich heritage. Artists ranged from two year old Abby to Viv Ball, and according to Rob you can't get much older than that!

Many friendships were renewed and new friendships forged. If you've never experienced one of these "camp-outs" start saving now, as Rob and Cynthia just might give up another 6 months of their busy lives to give us another mountain-top experience. Thank you, Cynthia and Rob.

Editor's note: Another article by Rita Mills covering the last week of this excursion in more detail and a summing up by Rob Watkins will appear in the next *Whirrakee*.

From the Mailbag

Author: Elaine Mathison

Each month the club receives a number of newsletters and magazines: some by subscription and some in exchange for *Whirrakee*. These are available from the Club librarian at our meetings.

THE BIRD OBSERVER No. 738 Jan/Feb 1994

'Birdwatching in Darwin' by Ray Nojek tells of the writer's meeting with visitors from Canberra armed with binoculars, field guide and local map. Just about every bird they had seen since arriving in Darwin the day before was new to them. He suggested some of his favourite birdwatching places, which prompted him to consider - where do you find birds in Darwin?

'Thoroughly Modern Brolgas' by Graham Pizzey describes the behaviour of these splendid birds observed in the southern Grampians. The importance of stubble fields for foraging is outlined along with the significance of post-breeding 'flocking'.

'Broome and the Kimberleys Revisited' by Mike and Ann Kerr reports on the pleasures of travel along the Kimberley coastal area. Islands were visited and rivers explored; nearly 200 bird species were seen during the 22 day trip.

'What's in a "Bird" Name' by Rodger Elliot deals with a number of plants which have 'names with an implied ornithological relationship.' Examples are: Showy Parrot-Pea, Pigeon-berry Ash, Bird's Eye, Green Bird Flower and Bird's Nest Fern.

HABITAT (Aust Conservation Foundation) Vol 1, No. 22 February 1994

'Power Politics' by Mark Diesendorf discusses major reforms in the electricity industry, currently guided not by the need to make the industry ecologically sustainable but by an economic agenda. However, key modifications to the reforms would be of ecological and economic importance.

'Waterwise: Managing Urban Catchments' by Tim Fisher outlines the long term commitment needed from land and water management agencies, government, business and the wider community to maintain and improve the quality of our water supply. The writer deals with supply, recycling, sewage, stormwater and how to manage catchments.

'Competing Interests or Common Ground?' by Melinda Nutting discusses Aboriginal participation in the management of protected areas. A new report from the ACF recognizes that such participation is fundamentally a land rights issue.

'Fast Track for False Promises' by Bob Phelps points out that genetic engineering has been promoted as the solution to many of the world's most pressing problems. In reality its goals are largely determined by corporate objectives and the end results are unpredictable. The community must decide whether this questionable technology will be used.

Cinnamon Bells, *Gastrodia sesamoides* in Bendigo

Author: Sue Beattie

On November 20, 1993 I was amazed to discover several plants of the Cinnamon Bells or Potato Orchid growing in one of the cultivated gardens surrounding LaTrobe University, Bendigo.The strong cinnamon scent and brown leafless stalks give a clear indication of their presence. Doubting their identification due to the unusual locality, I asked Rod Orr to confirm the find.

There were 11 stalks; all had almost finished flowering. They had been growing there almost unnoticed for several years, the stalks were up to 40 cm. high. We assumed that the seeds had been brought in with the leaf litter and deep mulch in which they were growing and that the sprinkler system provided plenty of water.

Cinnamon Bells have not been previously found in the Bendigo area. They require high rainfall and are usually associated with stringybark and messmate forests, growing in fibrous leaf litter. The usual localities are the Otways, the Grampians and sub-alpine areas of the Victorian Divide. The nearest localities to Bendigo are the Wombat State Forest and probably Mt. Macedon. Being saprophytic (they have no chlorophyll) they gain their energy from an associated fungus. Presumably this fungus was in the soil when the seeds or tubers were transported from the original locality. It has been assumed that messmate or stringybark are also necessary as part of the symbiotic association. However, the plants growing in the garden were Silver Birch, *Grevillea* (garden hybrids, *G. rosmarinifolia* cross) and *Callistemon* (garden *Callistemon* cross). Across the path were growing Blackwood wattle and tree fern; however, no orchids were found underneath these plants.

The root tuber of this orchid is typical of orchids, looking somewhat like the root of ginger. The aboriginal people ate the starchy 'potato' as food. Presumably the fungus invades this tuber but as no visible fruiting body is present the fungus has as yet not been identified.

I am indebted to Rod Orr for both confirming the plant identifications and helping with this article.

Cinnamon Bells *Gastrodia sesamoides*
Photographer: Sue Beattie

Tortoises Revisited

The following should have been added to the article "Tortoises of Bendigo" by Darren Green which appeared in the February issue of *Whirrakee*:

"Acknowledgements
I would like to thank Dale Gibbons, Grant Turner and Mark Hosking on their comments to this article."
Our apologies for this ommission (eds.)

The author Darren Green also supplied a slide which could not be reproduced in time for that issue of the magazine, so here it is:

Murray River Tortoise ***Emydura macquarii*** (hatching)
Photographer: Darren Green

Notices

Mid Murray Field Naturalists Club

Campout on the Queen's Birthday Weekend

June 10 - 13

Mallee Fowl Reserve, south of Boundary Bend.

Please let them know if you wish to attend (phone 050 302644)

Know Your Committee

The following is a list of the names and addresses of members of the Club Committee:

Jane Cleary, 24 Goynes Rd Epsom 3557, ph. 484396
Lyn Hamilton, 3 Park Ave Golden Square, ph. 478884
Rob & Glenise Moors, Mandurang South Road Sedgwick, R.S.D. Mandurang South 3539, ph. 396254
Sue Beattie, 39 Browning Street Kangaroo Flat 3555, ph. 477787
Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Cres Bendigo 3550, ph. 434063
Bob Ruddick, 1-5 Markovitch Lane, R.S.D.4 Markovitch Lane Bendigo Mail Centre 3539, ph. 493287
Maurice Stone, 39 Browing Street Kangaroo Flat 3555, ph. 477787
Alf Howe, 2 Derrimut Road White Hills 3550, ph. 483383
Peter Howden, Gunns Lane Axedale 3551, ph. 392520
Rod Orr, 2 Cockerel Court Bendigo 3550, ph. 435668
John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane Mandurang 3551, ph. 395710

Diary

All General and Bird Observers Group meetings are held at the Department of Food and Agriculture, corner Taylor St and Midland Highway Epsom, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meeting

Wednesday April 13, 7:30pm. Rod Orr will talk about waterplants and/or photogenic weeds. There will be lots of slides !
The talk by Gary Sobey, as advertised in the March *Whirrakee* will not take place.

Bird Observers Group

Friday April 8, 7:30pm. Wayne Caldow, a farmer from Edenhope will speak on his work on the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo in south-west Victoria. Please note the different meeting date - the second Friday in April.

Friday May 6, 7:30pm. Bev Culvenor will talk about her recent trip to arid Australia with an all-women scientific expedition. Other members will discuss their holiday birding.

Excursions

Sunday April 17. We will visit "Skydancers" Orchid and Butterfly Nursery in Castlemaine. We will be leaving from Havlin Street Outside the Ministry of Education Complex at 10pm. Please bring lunch. Entry fee to "Skydancers" is $ 3.00.

Sunday May 15. We will visit the Patons Road end of the Eppalock Forest for a 5km (approximately) walk. This walk will be along a ridge with box-stringybark and Red Ironbark forest and will have views over the surrounding countryside. We will leave Havlin Street at 9am. Please take food and water as we will be lunching *en route*. Leader: Anne Bridley (49 3479).

Supper

The usual arrangements for supper are as follows: members either bring a plate or pay $ 1 for supper. This small amount is used by the Treasurer to reimburse members who purchase essential supper supplies.